

The Times They Are a-Changin

A

By **Jim Oliver**, CPA, CGMA, 2017-2018 TSCPA Chairman

s Professors Don Carpenter and Tim Thomasson discuss in their article on page 38 and Jason Freeman covers in his Tax Topics column this issue, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) of 2017 has substantially modified and eliminated major sections of the tax code. Additionally, entirely new provisions will require clarification from the Internal Revenue Service through regulations and will likely necessitate a technical corrections act to correct what Congress actually intended, but did not accomplish, in the drafting.



The uncertainty and changes brought by the TCJA will demand a major shift in mindset for CPAs advising their clients on various tax savings moves, from when (and even how) to make charitable contributions to which type of business entity

provides the maximum tax savings. What we once took for granted no longer will necessarily be true, which compels deeper thought and analysis, at least until the new becomes normal.

Our profession has always been one engulfed in and responding to change. There are tax law changes every year; the latest accounting and auditing standards require study and implementation; and new regulations bring different challenges to business and industry. How we work today only holds faint resemblance to how CPAs worked a century ago.

New technology has particularly transformed our work. We have adapted to and adopted cloud-based solutions, mobile technology, scanning solutions and paperless offices. We deliver information through portals and secure emails; we answer emails on our phones and access what we need without ever being in an office. As implementation of artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain, cryptocurrencies, autonomous transportation, big data analytics and robotics grows, CPAs must continue to respond to the challenges and opportunities that new technology brings. Even the alarming rise in cybercriminals brings another opening to be key advisors to clients and employers as we identify and address cyber risks or to report on the adequacy of a company's cybersecurity risk management.

To address and exploit these changes involves learning and applying different skills than those we may have needed in the past. A World Economic Forum (WEF) report, *The Future of Jobs*, identified 10 skills needed to thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, coordinating with others, emotional intelligence, judgment and decision making, service orientation, negotiation and cognitive flexibility.

“

TSCPA COMMITS TO EMPOWERING MEMBERS THROUGH SUPPORTING PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AND CONNECTING MEMBERS TO RESOURCES AND EACH OTHER.

”

The abilities that I thought I needed when I started in the profession (remembering debits on the left, credits on the right; running a 10-key; ticking and tying; cutting and pasting, and following the prior year workpapers) no longer seem even remotely relevant to what we do and will do as CPAs.

Far more important to what we do today are those WEF's recognized skills. We seek those capabilities in the people we hire, retain, develop and promote. Those competencies break into essentially two equally important categories: how we think and how we relate to people. Trusted advisors will solve problems not by processing data (which machines will do), but by applying critical and creative thinking and judgment to complex circumstances. People skills will continue to grow in importance to our success. So-called soft skills are now the new hard skills.

As circumstances and technology evolve, the profession and we as individual CPAs will continue to adapt to meet new requirements and demands. TSCPA will as well. Organizational flexibility is one of the guiding principles in our TSCPA 2020 strategic plan. As CPAs continue in their commitment to lifelong learning, the Society commits to empowering members through supporting professional excellence and connecting members to resources and each other.

Our work will continue to change, likely at an even more furious pace. Yet we remain anchored in the constancy of those values inherent in who we are as CPAs. Our commitment to integrity, objectivity and competence must endure even as we adjust to the new challenges of these changing times. ■

Jim Oliver, CPA, CGMA

is a partner with Houston-based CPA firm Calvetti Ferguson and resides in San Antonio. He can be contacted at joliver@calvettiferguson.com.